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Cornell viticulture student named Shaulis Scholarship recipient

By Joe Ogradnick

Geneva, NY: Ben Riccardi, a senior in Cornell's viticulture program, has been named the recipient of the 2007 Nelson Shaulis Award. The award offers viticulture students an opportunity to work directly with Cornell grape research and extension faculty at Cornell's New York State Agricultural Extension Station in Geneva, N.Y.

Riccardi will be working with Justine Vanden Heuvel, assistant professor in Horticultural Sciences, and Gavin Sacks, assistant professor in Food Science and Technology, on a project to improve the quality of hybrid grapes and wine. Their research will examine the effects of shoot thinning and leaf removal on vertically positioned shoots of Noiret grape plants. As part of the project, Riccardi will make wine from the treatments and analyze the impact of the treatments on perceived wine quality.

"Ben is a bright, enthusiastic student," Vanden Heuvel said.

"He's interested in all aspects of viticulture and enology, and it is a pleasure to have him in our research group. While I'm the major advisor for his project, he's also been spending some time with a number of the other research programs here at the Station involved with grapes and wine."

The Shaulis Award was established in 1978 to honor the famed professor of viticulture on the occasion of his retirement. During his long and active research career, Shaulis made two major contributions that had a profound effect on the grape industry. The first was a training system for grapes called the Geneva Double Curtain. The system was initiated at the Geneva station in 1960; field trials with growers began in 1964. The system effectively doubles the cordon length per acre of vineyard and is used to train vines of certain vigorous varieties of grapes used for processing.

A second significant contribution was Shaulis's work with cooperators from Cornell's Department of Agricultural Engineering (now Biological and Environmental Engineering) that resulted in the development of the mechanical grape harvester. Today, virtually all the commercial grapes grown in New York and many other locales are harvested with equipment patterned after his design.

"I was thrilled when I learned that I was selected to receive the Shaulis Scholarship," Riccardi said. "I feel very honored that the selection committee felt that I met the qualifications."

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